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A Dissertation
on Dysentery
by Charles Beale
of Virg^a
Mar 26. 1818

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Were I to consult my own interest and inclination, I should not at this early epoch, when just entering the threshold of active life, and the path of medical science, presume to present you this imperfect production. But wishing to accede to the laws of the University, I proceed with much diffidence to offer some remarks on the symptoms and cure of Dysentery. I shall be as brief as the nature of the subject will admit, and shall principally confine my description to that mode of practice which I have witnessed successful in this disease; taking this occasion to mention, that it is not the prerogative of inexperienced youth to criticise and condemn the practice of those of riper years.

Of the Dysentery

The Dysentery is usually preceded by a febrile indisposition, which is sometimes considerable. It is characterised by the symptoms of fever in general, such as alternate chills and heats, a full, hard, and tense pulse,

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though more often, by a frequent and chorded pulse, a hot dry skin, and pains in various parts of the system, mostly in the head: sometimes there are pains in the side resembling pleuritic stitches, rendering respiration laborious, at other times the pains are mostly confined to the region of the abdomen. On other occasions most of the febrile symptoms are wanting, especially where the disease is ushered in by a Diarrhœa, which is not unfrequently the case.

The Stomach from the first is generally disordered, which is often manifest, from the furred or foul tongue, loss of appetite, nausea, bitter eructations, and the vomiting of bilious or other offensive matter: the bowels are often flatulent, and generally constipated, unless the disease is brought on by a Diarrhœa, as I before mentioned.

These symptoms do not continue long, before the disease is distinguished by its more certain Diagnosticks; viz.: pains in various parts of the intestinal canal, which are sometimes so tormenting as to be compared to the sensation of contortion or twisting. These symptoms are

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soon followed by frequent and small, mucus or slimy stools, generally streaked with blood, which are voided with violent griping, and occasionally there is a painful protrusion of the rectum; sometimes there is a discharge of blood unmixed with mucus or fæces, I say fæces, but probably this is an improper phrase, as natural fæces seldom appear, and when they do, they are commonly, as Cullen and others describe them, of a hardened and rounded form: in one instance I witnessed the discharge of a cheso-like substance as mentioned by Bingle. There is almost always a troublesome tenesmus.

Various have been the theories of the antients respecting the causes of Dysentery, of which I shall take no notice, but shall only mention those causes which have been sanctioned and confirmed by modern experience.

In children and even in adults, it is sometimes brought on by eating immoderate quantities of unripe or ripe fruits, of which I have seen many cases; by exposure to the vicissitudes of the weather, particularly to the night air, and lying upon damp ground, thereby checking the

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perspirable matter; hence its frequent occurrence in Campaigns; by hardened excrement retained for an improper length of time in the bowels; by suffering a Diarrhoea to run on too long; thereby, as some have asserted, and with no want of plausibility, destroying the tone of the muscular fibres of the intestines, which on this account become the seat of a morbid afflux of blood. I have heard of an over-dose of Tart. Ant exciting a Hypercatharsis and eventually the Dysentery. These appear to be only the exciting or proximate causes of Dysentery: the remote or predisposing cause appears to consist in some peculiar state of the Atmosphere, for where the Dysent. prevails, it is generally in the form of an Epidemic twice in the year, viz. in the spring and fall; at these seasons, the above causes usually bring on Dys.ty, but at other times they are indulged almost with impunity. I am aware that cases of Dysentery appear in the winter and summer, but these are rather to be considered spurious or anomalous cases, and therefore cannot invalidate the position. It is also known that the same causes which influence the Intermittent and Remittent fevers,

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I come next to [illegible] of the indications of cure.

They are, first, to reduce the action [illegible] [illegible], if it be excessive, [illegible], to [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and the [illegible], to [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to the [illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]; [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] this measure [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] generally [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] cases [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. The third indication [illegible] [illegible]

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[illegible] Sweden is [illegible] is not altogether [illegible]. It was used by Dr. Priestley and Stephens [illegible]. It was also [illegible], that it was used in Dr. Black's and other experiments on the [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible] in the [illegible] of the [illegible] in this country, [illegible] in the West Indies. Most of the machineers of the present day are in the habit of employing it on some form in the treatment of his [illegible]. The [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. Sir A., M.P., [illegible] who have written on the subject [illegible] in the [illegible] [illegible] induced to speak of it. From the [illegible] of this article, we might perhaps suppose it [illegible] to be [illegible] of [illegible]. In the [illegible] Sweden [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] in medicine. [illegible] by a case or two hereafter. [illegible] in a different way. [illegible] Case Baker, [illegible] attributed to its purgative quality, but this is incorrect [illegible] as other articles [illegible] a more [illegible] tive effect are not attended with the same result. [illegible]

[illegible] an astringent quality, [illegible] seen, [illegible] in Dy[illegible], where with [illegible] But it is not my intention to account for the various operations (which I confess I am totally unable to do,) but to relate the [illegible] of [illegible].

[illegible] will [illegible] there is [illegible]

the stomach, and we wish to make a more durable impression on this organ, we may require two grains of Tart. Ant. to a scruple of Ipecac.* Where the stomach is not affected, we may commence the use of the ipecac as follows. Ascertain what it is necessary that it should remain upon the stomach in sufficient quantity to excite vomiting: five grains of it may be given with children of two years old, or two grains, proportionably to age, &c.

If this quantity should excite vomiting, [illegible] it, [illegible] is, [illegible] to the intestines. If none should, however, arise, after a proper interval, the action of the bowels is to be induced by small doses of the castor oil, [illegible] short intervals, until the bowels are well evacuated. With this view I have found it best to make it in pills of a grain each, and which is to be administered every hour or two, or oftener as occasion to bring them up, and the bowels are made to move as often, or as many as the stomach will bear. When treated in this way, it is necessary that it be made to retain, after having taken sixteen or twenty pills in entirely

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relieved. Case 1st Mrs W— an elderly lady was seized with Dysy^ty, she commenced with taking the sixth of a grain each, one every hour and in the course of two days was entirely cured. It was remarked that the symptoms were very violent in this case, after taking several of the pills, the symptoms were much aggravated, and after taking sixteen, her bowels were well evacuated and she completely cured. I might swell this list to an almost incredible amount, where the disease has been cured nearly in the same way, were it necessary.

I have sometimes seen violent purgative effects from the exhibition of Ipa, as was hinted above.

Case 2d Mr— was seized with Dysentery, he began to take the pills, which vomited him; he discontinued them, after taking some other purgatives without much benefit, he returned back in great pain, the use of the pills after violent vomiting, he was entirely relieved of the pain and the Dysenteric symptoms, without their vomiting any evacuation whatever, but being costive, he took a dose or two of Castor Oil, for which he came to the Hosp) which brought away a great quantity of bile.

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Case 2nd, A gentleman of the medical profession was riding a journey, and was suddenly seized with great pain in the abdomen [illegible] a purging, attended to stool [illegible] [illegible] some [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] two [illegible] and continued it in a small draught [illegible], which relieved him immediately. Case 3rd, J. C— a lawyer had considerable griping in the bowels, but two table [illegible] of [illegible] which soon relieved him. Many other cases might be adduced in proof of its [illegible], but these suffice.

It frequently happens however that the termination of the disease is not so fortunate, the mucous stools continue, sometimes with a mixture of blood, and a troublesome tenesmus remains: here we must continue the use of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] until nature [illegible] [illegible]. It is not uncommon [illegible] that the tenesmus remains after [illegible] [illegible] the mode of [illegible] [illegible] well [illegible] [illegible] benefit. I have seen the disease [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] hemorrhage of the intestines. Dr Chalmers is [illegible] an [illegible] or rather an expectation [illegible]

modus operandi in these cases, which I think will ap-plant and superior to all others. It is [illegible] in alleviation much [illegible]. It hardly causes [illegible] action which so commonly tends to subsequent Hemorrhage.

I come now to speak of those cases to which Ipecac-is not adapted: 1st The stomach of some persons are so irritable, as to preclude the use of [illegible] in any efficient form. 2nd where there is a vast accu-mulation of bile which is a frequent concomitant of Dy—y; such a torpor or insensibility of the bowels in some in-stances prevails, that the more active purgatives alone will have any effect upon them. 3rd [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

In these cases we may resort to Calomel [illegible] what I think is better, to use it in conjunction with Ipecac. Where the bowels are [illegible] [illegible], as is common in [illegible] [illegible] of this [illegible], [illegible]

such as calomel and Blue pill, castor oil and the like, in which a combination of calomel and Rhubarb was resorted to with considerable success, and half the dose was generally repeated after the first was passed.

Leeches were here employed with much benefit and should in similar cases not be neglected. They should be at the nearest hand. The warm bath was found to be one case, where the patient was young and small with a happy result, but we cannot speak from experience of this measure with equal confidence in many cases. May not the vapour bath be substituted, as it is in the same cases. Castor oil given alone or made into an emulsion with the yolk of an egg answers very well in many cases, and many other purgatives are used with a happy effect. In almost every body does a purgative, generally.

They should, as a general rule be continued until another dose follows, or the symptoms are relieved.

Cullen recommended the administration of a blister to the abdomen in obstinate cases. Drs. Dixon Chapman and others are in the habit of using them with manifest advan-

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the necessity for these are generally, and in every case I have seen, entirely superceded by a flannel shirt, or what may be better, by swathing the body from the hips to the axillae with a flannel roller, in the manner recommended by Dr Chapman. In all the Gastric and bowel affections, it has been found essentially necessary to pay particular attention to the condition of the patients feet, as there is a great connection sympathetically between these parts. The feet therefore should be kept dry and warm. For this purpose, in addition to worsted stockings, he may wear a sole in the bottom of his shoe or boot, made of the same materials and in the same way the Hatters make their hats. I have known long continued Gastric affections cured by this simple contrivance alone.

Among the remedies for Dyspepsia, diet certainly deserves to be ranked. Animal food in the inflammatory stage is not to be allowed, those vegetables also, which are likely to become ascescent, should be avoided. Those which appear to be most free of this principle, are; rice, sago, Tapioca, and arrow root. They should be well boiled, especi-

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ally the rice and Tapioca, as otherwise they are found to be very indigestible.

Spices and all fermented liquors are to be prohibited.

The patients drink should consist, of simple water, toast-and water, or mucilage dissolved in water &c.

Charles Beale
Warrenton
Fauquier County
Virginia

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